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SUBJECT: Suriname: Political Parties Lack Fiscal Transparency and Internal Democratic Processes

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11. (SBU) Summary. With interest in Suriname's May 2010 elections primarily focused on the drama among Suriname's political parties, especially on whether former military dictator Desi Bouterse plans to run for president while he stands trial for murder, little attention is paid to the basic elements of party democracy. Suriname's political parties demonstrate little to no internal democracy, as each party's old guard strangles any move to elect a new chair or to chart an upward path for up-and-coming leaders. Nor is there transparency on the source of financial contributions to parties. Even with some parties starting to break away from Suriname's historically ethnic-based politics, power-brokering, coalition-building, backroom deals, and nepotism still dominate. The lack of these key elements in part explains why predicting alliances and the outcome is challenging, as Suriname's May 2010 elections unfold. End Summary.

12. (SBU) In a recent meeting with PolOff, an Embassy contact from the Democracy Unit at the Anton de Kom University of Suriname (ADEK) referred to Suriname's political parties as "election machines," and asserted that the parties are active only once every five years (at election time). According to Dr. Hans Breeveld, Surinamese political parties have no vision on society, no platform, and do not reach out to the public on issues -- they are merely practical entities that exist to get elected and have no true political ideology.

13. (SBU) Breeveld explained that since the 1987 Decree "Law on Political Parties," although political parties are required to publish an annual report on their finances, political parties now avoid this by keeping their money in "foundations." Funding sources for these foundations are not transparent (whether it is from foreign donors (Ref A), from international businesses, or from illicit activities such as narcotics trafficking or money laundering), nor is it transparent to whom favors will later be owed. Political parties are sometimes not even transparent on sources of funding within their leadership, and even the party's treasurer may not know the source of the funding. A businessman may, for example, meet with a political party chair with no one else present. Later, if the chair claims the businessman donated \$75,000, there is no evidence of how much money was really handed over or what promises were made in exchange for the money. The lack of transparency on donations has resulted in a climate where power is held by party financiers and not by the voters.

14. (SBU) In most Suriname political parties the chair of the party can retain his/her position as long as desired. Often the party seems to exist primarily to support the chair's political

aspirations. In addition, with the exception of two political parties, regular internal elections for party leadership are not held, preventing any leadership change or development of up-and-coming leaders within the party. Breeveld explained that this arose from Suriname's political history of emancipation politics. Democracy within the party was not the priority; rather, the priority was to improve the political and socioeconomic status of the party's (usually ethnic) constituents. The constituents tended to be loyal to the party in exchange for the progress of their ethnic, socioeconomic class. This system of emancipation politics served an important role in democratizing and equalizing Suriname's society (in essence, according to Breeveld, moving power from the whites and mulattos and redistributing it more evenly.) This system helped keep Suriname stable and at peace despite the many ethnic groups in the country.

15. (SBU) At the same time, this multiple, no majority political party system may have disadvantaged Suriname in some respects by delaying government progress on a number of fronts, resulting in social harmony without development. Government employees are often hired based on ethnicity or political party membership rather than on competency, education, or work experience. Political appointees fill positions at all levels of the government.

16. (SBU) Breeveld indicated however that past loyalties to ethnic Internal Democratic Processes

political parties are beginning to disappear. He gave the examples of eroding support for the National Party of Suriname (NPS) and the United Reform Party (VHP), among Creole and East Indian voters, respectively. The usual ethnic support base for these two prominent parties has begun to decline with the emergence of a younger electorate that takes its higher education and economic opportunities for granted. He contrasted this with political parties catering to Javanese and Maroon ethnicities. Because these population groups remain by comparison less affluent, the voters still remain mostly loyal to the ethnic-based political parties that promise them better opportunities.

17. (SBU) Comment: Transparency of and democratization within political parties are missing elements in Suriname's democracy. The lack of these elements will impact how Suriname's May 2010 election process unfolds. While certain topics, such as ethnic politics, are widely discussed in Suriname, some simpler democratic fundamentals go overlooked.

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